

I am pleased to be here today to support SB 82 on behalf of the Association of Montana Public Health Officials (AMPHO) and the Montana Public Health Association (MPHA). AMPHO is an organization composed of the directors of local public health departments from across the state. MPHA is an organization with a diverse membership from many fields who share the common purpose of protecting the health of a population and creating policies that protect and promote health. Our organizations have ranked SB 82 as one of our associations' top priorities this session because we know that a primary seatbelt law will reduce the leading cause of accidental injuries and death in Montana.

GENERAL HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION	
EXHIBIT NO.	9
DATE	1-27-2011
FILE NO.	SB 82

In the 2007 legislature a similar bill was defeated. Our organizations would like to address some of the arguments that were given against this bill at that time:

"But this is an individual's choice; we can't take away this liberty"

Montanans support a primary seatbelt law. In 2010 a representative sample of 3,103 Montanans was surveyed and 63% supported a primary seat belt law. Montanans support a seatbelt law because they want to have a "choice". They want a choice in whether we spend millions of dollars each year on direct health care costs for unbelted patients. They want a choice on whether we spend millions annually for the hospital care of the Uninsured and Medicaid-covered unbelted occupants' preventable injuries. They want a choice on the resulting economic loss hundreds of millions of dollars of unbelted motor vehicle occupants cause which include vocational rehabilitation, market productivity, household productivity, insurance administration, workplace costs, and legal/court costs.

States that have a primary seatbelt law have seen an increase in seatbelt use of 7 to 14%. Current seatbelt use in Montana is 69%, and an increase to 90% would save an estimated total of \$18, 0000 million in health care costs with \$7 million savings directly on the state budget. As many as 20 - 30 lives would be saved per year and I think Montanans "choice "would be to save these lives and to save this money, especially in today's tough economic times.

"We already have a "law" on the books"

This law can't be enforced; it is the **only** law on Montana's books that can't be enforced. Under current state law, drivers or passengers can be cited for not wearing a seat belt only after a vehicle is stopped for another reason. Why have a law that makes no difference in behavior and when we realize it makes no difference we don't change it. Seatbelt laws are passed to encourage the use of seatbelts. If you can't enforce the law then you can't change behavior. Would a secondary speed limit law make sense? Law enforcement would be allowed to stop someone for speeding only if he was breaking another law while he was speeding. A secondary speed limit law doesn't make sense and a secondary seat belt law doesn't make sense either. We need a "law" that allows law enforcement to stop and ticket a driver for not wearing a seat belt, just like any other routine violation.

And finally,

"I know of a person who would have been killed if they had been wearing their seat belt"

Crashes involving fire and water happen only 1/2 of one per cent of all crashes. So it doesn't happen often. However, when they do occur the chance of survival rests in remaining conscience, uninjured and in full

possession of your faculties. The greatest danger is with the impact that precedes the fire or submersion in water. If you are not wearing a seat belt it's very likely that you will be knocked unconscious or severely injured. If you are belted it's very likely you will be able to unbuckle yourself and get out.

Being thrown safely in a crash is almost impossible. Because when you are thrown, you may be thrown through a windshield, scraped along the pavement, or even crushed by your own vehicle or another one. The idea of being thrown from a car and landing in a grassy area is pure fantasy. Your best bet is to stay inside the vehicle, securely held by your safety belt.

We'd like to thank the Highways and Transportation Committee and Senator Hamlett for bringing this important legislation forward and our organizations strongly encourage your support.

Sincerely,

Lora Wier RN

466- 2562

590-5125